

(12)
JESUS, altogether lovely:

OR A

L E T T E R

TO SOME OF

The SINGLE WOMEN

IN THE

METHODIST SOCIETY.

*Be of one Mind, live in Peace, and the God of Love,
and Peace shall be with you. 2 Cor: xiii. 11.*

L O N D O N,

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A

LETTER, &c.

My dear Sisters,

HOXTON,
March 10. 1763.

S I N C E the time my heavenly father hath been pleased to discover to me, it was his will to call me from you to another place, this thought has often occurred to my mind, "Have I discharged my duty faithfully towards them? Have I strove to discern their every danger, and to warn them of it, as if it were my own soul? And have I from time to time, not failed to declare unto them whatever has appeared to me a more excellent way? As I looked back, I found I was dissatisfied, and many things arose in my mind, as necessary to be spoken, before I could be content to part with you. Again, I thought, though I should speak them now, yet after a little time, I shall feel a desire of repeating them. This consideration induced me to write a few lines to each of you, that I may be clear of your blood.

My desire and prayer to God for you is, that you may every moment behold Jesus, as *altogether lovely*! The infinite consequence this is of to your soul, has often been the subject of our conversation. That there is but one way of beholding him now, and that this way is by faith, we all know; but how to keep this eye of the soul always clear and unfulfilled, like the finest glass, free from every speck and flaw, is the point we want to be instructed in. Let us therefore simply draw near to him who will give us wisdom liberally, because we need it; and who while we serve him in uprightness, will not lay folly to our charge.

Our grand enemy, well knowing that nothing can hurt the soul, while its eye is simply fixed on Jesus, makes his continual attack here : sometimes by pleasing, sometimes by painful objects, which he is always presenting to the mind, hoping to turn away its eye from him, who alone is lovely ; and because this roaring lion is always watching for our destruction, and every object round us tends to the same end, our Lord hath strictly commanded all who would follow him, 1st. To take up their cross daily, and adly. To deny themselves.

It is by a life of self-denial alone, that the eye of our faith can be kept clear. I was not a little blest the other day with the words of a good man, expressing his desire of being devoted to God, in a solemn observance of *chastity*, *poverty*, and *obedience*. The words struck me much, and appeared to contain the whole of a christian life. The Lord was pleased to apply them close to my soul : and I will endeavour simply to relate what then occurred on each head. Indeed I know not since our lot has been cast together that I have ever received any blessing but what, with God's help I have strove to communicate to you.

I. On CHASTITY.

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.

THEIR Eye being unclouded, doth behold the *Invisible* in every thing. Heaven above, and Earth beneath, all to them is full of God. Their understanding, being no longer darkened with any pollution of flesh or spirit, they continually, as a clear mirror, reflect the glorious image of Him, whom beholding, they are constrained to cry out, " My beloved is fairer than ten thousand, and *altogether lovely*." And while we are speaking of Chastity in its first sense (I mean with reference to Jesus and the soul) we shall easily discern that every deviation from him, is a degree of spiritual adultery. Is he the God of our body, and not of our soul ? Doth he require us to keep our garments unspotted, and doth

he not require purity in the inward parts? Surely he doth; for *without holiness of heart, no man shall see the Lord*. And however fair and beautiful our outward life may appear, unless our heart is kept unpolluted, Jesus will not come and make his abode with us. Now what outward sin does to the body, thoughts do to the soul; and as a wife treacherously departing from her husband, divorces herself from him according to the law of God; so the soul embracing any imagination or idea, contrary to the purity of her heavenly bridegroom, dissolves the union subsisting between them. And yet, so strange is the infatuation under which we labour, that many who would start at outward sin, will nevertheless very quietly submit to be carried away for minutes, (nay, perhaps hours) with such thoughts, as grievously retard their progress in holiness.

Reflecting with sorrow on this a few nights ago, it was in a lively manner impress'd upon my mind, that we should consider our souls as the image of God, and our bodies as temples of the Lord, both pure and consecrated to his service: and our hearts as an altar, on which the love of Jesus as a pure flame, should continually burn: and that the fuel we are to cast into this fire, is every earthly object that presenteth itself, whether to the eye, the ear, or any other of our senses: casting them in as soon as perceived, feeling the force of that expression, "All the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice to Jesu's love!" And it would not be long 'ere our tender-hearted Lord would answer,—"A sacrifice well-pleasing in my sight."

A 2d sense in which I would consider the above expression, some I know may take offence at. But it is not my business to please: I am only to do all I can for your soul, simply committing it to that God, whose I am, and whom I desire in all things to obey. I here apply myself to those, whose desire it is to care only *how they may please the Lord*; and for that reason, make it their cry day and night, that they may be preserved from every snare, and singly live to Jesus.

To *you*, who are able to receive this saying, I will speak the inmost sentiments of my heart. Whatever

others are, *you* are called to the glorious privileges of a single life. O cast them not behind you; nor, having beheld the beauties of the lovely Jesus, now forget, that he is fairer than the sons of men. I shall not attempt to enumerate the particular advantages of your situation: I am not perswading you to it; I need not. All your soul stretches itself out, after that entire devotion to him, whom having *seen* you love: and your heart bounds within you while you say to every presenting object,

“ A nobler Lord for mine I claim,
Nor less than God’s eternal Son.”

My business with *you* is, only to guard you against those snares, which *Satan* will assuredly lay for your feet.

The first, and indeed the most dangerous snare he can throw in your way is, any kind or degree of intimacy with single men. Indeed I would wish you to be very sparing in your conversation with any man; but more especially with those that are single. All familiarity with these ought to be avoided; even with the most devout; “ for the most innocent commerce with them, if it wounds not our conscience, leaves a stain on our reputation; and the smoke blackens, when the fire does not burn us.”

The second stratagem of *Satan* will be, to overcloud your light, and lead you to dwell, in your mind, on the advantages you might meet with in another way of life; and if once he can get you so far, he will soon draw a curtain over those delightful views; stop those sweet breathings of your soul after Jesus, which once you enjoyed in the days of your simplicity, when your soul was a stranger to any other language, than

“ Jesus, thee *alone* I know
Monarch of my simple heart.”

To avoid this, you must stand all the day long on your watch-tower, fixing it in your mind,—I have given myself wholly unto thee; and “ will know no other love than thine: and every thought to thee:

contrary, however innocent in its appearance, however reasonable or profitable, must be cast into that fire of Jesu's love burning on your heart! What to another woman may be innocent, to *you* would be pollution: that which to a free woman might be even commendable, to her that is bound to an husband, would be a degree of adultery. Leave not then your heavenly Bridegroom; no not for one moment; not even in thought: but lean your feeble soul continually on him, who even in this life is *able to keep you from falling and to preserve you faultless in the presence of his glory with exceeding joy.*

But if thro' the power of God, you are preserved from the first and second snare, his next business will be to tempt you to pride, and a judging spirit; saying to all, who do not walk according to your rule, "stand by, for I am holier than thou." And when this is the case, God is as it were constrained to let you feel, that without his immediate help there is nothing so criminal into which you may not fall. O beware of judging; for God is love, and every wound to love may therefore in some sense be said, to be a wound to God. May he, who came, not to judge, but to save the world, preserve you from this most pernicious of all evils. Never then consider yourself as secure, but hang every moment on Jesus, as if on the very brink of falling; and let your reading, meditation and prayer, turn as much as may be, on the advantages of a single life. And may a holy ambition, to know nothing but Jesus, fire your spirits, while you are made deeply sensible "no grace can be guarded but by humility."

On P O V E R T Y.

WE may consider this with regard first to outward things, and secondly the temper of the soul. And here we have eminently the example of our blessed Lord, who became poor for us; and while the whole earth was his, and all the fulness of it, was nevertheless himself as a banished man, not having where to lay his head. And if the spirit of our Lord is in us, we shall willingly embrace, for

his sake, what he embraced for our's. I do not here mean, that we are always bound, at once to dispose of all we have in this world, in order to become a Christian. By no means: we should in many cases by so doing, put it out of our power to act in that sphere of life, God hath called us unto. But I mean, that we should so possess, as if we possessed not; remembering, that nothing of what we possess is properly *our own*; but only delivered over to us for a little time, that as faithful stewards, we may dispose of every farthing for his poor family, a part of which we are; and therefore have with them an equal right to all that is *necessary*, for that place God hath fixed us in. But O what need have we to beware, lest our own will should make that appear necessary, which in God's account is not so; and we should at last hear our Lord say, "Inasmuch as ye have *not done it* to these my brethren, ye have *not done it unto Me*."—May God preserve the rich professors of our day, lest they also come under the same condemnation!

But is this poverty in temporal things all which God requires? Surely, no. It is the *poor in spirit* our Lord hath pronounced blessed; and declares, that their's is the kingdom of heaven. But that we may the more closely apply it to ourselves, let us 1st consider, what this poverty of spirit does not, 2dly what it does consist in; and 3dly, what are the fruits we may expect from it?

1st, It does not consist in lowly words, in saying, God hath done nothing for us, when we know he hath wrought many and great deliverances; or, in at all denying what he hath done for our souls.

2dly, It does not consist in so becoming all things to all men, as to hurt our own souls; to countenance sin; or to be backward in testifying our Saviour openly.

But it consists in the *true* knowledge of ourselves, from the light of God shining on our hearts, by faith. And this knowledge is the ground and foundation of all religion. This is the substance of that text, "Learn of me to be meek and lowly, and ye shall find rest to your souls." And verily it is a rest none

can conceive, but by experience; for it lays a man so low, that every arrow goes over his head; yea, and it raises him so high, that he is out of the reach both of men and devils. For the souls that are truly humble cannot be cast down, since they know no other will but that of God; and being truly mortified, and united to Jesus, with a perfectly disinterested love, they delight as much in God's justice, as in his mercy; being perfectly willing to be visited by him in any manner he sees fit. They know their God is a consuming fire; and they glory in having him so; casting themselves as it were upon it, and rejoicing that all which will not bear this refining flame should be consumed: determined to drink deep into that spirit of humility, which alone can abide the day of his coming, or stand, when he appeareth.

But what are the fruits we may expect to see from this poverty of spirit? It will show itself in various ways; but in none more than these four:—unwearied patience——constant gentleness——entire resignation——and a perfect willingness to be accounted *nothing* in the esteem of man.

On this last head, permit me to be a little more particular; and if I should touch on some things trifling in your account, yet bear with me, since I do it in love to your souls. “He that disregardeth little things, shall fall by little and little.”

By the closest application therefore, let us examine ourselves, not only whether we are nothing in our *own eyes*; but whether we are willing to appear so in the eyes of others. I have some reason to fear there is too little of this spirit among us. It is not yet our motto, to be *without form or comeliness*, having nothing desirable in the eyes of any but Jesus? Otherwise, how shall I account for that exactness in your dress; that conformity to the fashion, even in the coarsest part of it? Why those ribbons or that trimming? Or those other little ornaments equally unnecessary? O that you were but possessed of such a spirit of true poverty, as would penetrate all your actions! It is your heart I pray the Lord to model; and then you will soon be convinced,

nothing is little, that can either help or hinder your progress in holiness. Indeed the great effect dress has upon the spirit, is not perceivable, but with those who walk very closely with God. I have known the spirit of God, gently reprove such an one for a *pin* too much. It was the opinion of a holy man, that of exterior humiliations, that of poor and mean clothing, is one of the chief.

There are two or three more little instances of self-denial, which you will find very conducive to the spirit I am speaking of.

1st, Be not forward to speak on that subject you can speak best upon. As much as may be, be silent where you are in danger of being praised. But if you cannot help hearing yourself commended, cast the remembrance of it from your mind, as you would a serpent from your bosom.

2dly, Do not *seek*, but studiously avoid the most conspicuous places at the time of divine worship. If you are not well aware, *Satan* will greatly serve himself of that time, which you intend in a particular manner should be devoted to God. Why are you uneasy at being forced to sit where you "can neither see nor be seen?" Do you want your own eye to wander? Or do you desire (O dreadful to repeat) that another's should wander through your means? Ah, how justly may the sentence be applied to many among us, "My house shall be called an house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves."

3dly, Above all, beware of proud thoughts. The mischief begins here, when you are represented to your own mind, in such or such a situation, and hear, as it were, your own mouth speaking with such prudence and sagacity. O fly these airy phantoms, as you would fly the devil. They are all from the bottomless pit. Resist them with that word, "I am nothing; God is all." It was pride made angels become devils. Watch against this as the grand enemy of your faith. Watch against all self-sufficiency; all independency of spirit; but of this I shall speak more presently.

III. On O B E D I E N C E.

TO you who have kept the faith, it will not be grievous to say, Study obedience as the rule of your life. Obedience to God, and to man, for his sake. But what is the obedience we owe to God? *Absolute and entire*; in small, as well as great things; and because it is in little things we are most apt to offend, I will speak most particularly of these. This obedience requires us always to have a ready mind, simply determined to follow the light of God, whatever it may cost us; and when we have laid ourselves out, and think to do some great thing for God, and our neighbour, to be equally willing, the end we proposed should be either answered, or frustrated. So likewise when we have proposed to spend a day in such or such a manner, and the providence of God prevents, we should remember, "the hairs of my head are all numbered." And none hath any power against a child of God, but what is given him from above. Therefore submit to it, as the order of that God who hath declared, that in his sight, "obedience is better than sacrifice; and to hearken than the fat of rams." In short we should see God in every thing, and make it our sole business, inwardly to listen to that still small voice, which none but silent souls can hear; and outwardly, to meet him in the order of his providence: remembring we are all his own, and "lying before him as soft wax, ready to be formed into any shape he pleases." And this simple recollecting ourselves in the presence of God, receiving every occurrence as from him; and offering up every action to him, is the spirit and life of true religion. Were we but more perfect in this lesson, we should continually experience the truth of those words, "the Lord is my hiding place and my castle, whercunto I may *always* resort?"

Next let us consider, what it is to obey man, for the Lord's sake, and whom we are so to obey?

1st. This obedience does not consist merely in *Affection*, "I will do what such a one orders, because I love him, or because he hath done me much good, and therefore I find great pleasure in obeying him." This is often idolatry rather than obedience.

2dly. Neither does it consist in obeying such or such a person, "because he is very spiritual, and perhaps nearer the heart of Christ, than most others." This is as if I was to throw away the laws of my own king, in order to follow those of another, because I believed him to be a better man.

Indeed I cannot conceive that obedience which God requires us to pay to man, to be any thing less, than a willing and ready submission to the directions, or desires of those, who are in authority over us (as far as the light of God in our souls does not contradict :) and that purely and entirely out of love to God, forgetting the creature, and only bearing in our minds, "It is *God* we obey in *him*." But one artifice of *Satan* which we have great need to guard against is, that we are often apt to imagine the light of God contradicts, when it really does not. And the very thing we fancy we may not comply with, would many times be of more use to us than any other: for indeed, What self denial can so unite our souls to God, as an entire renunciation of our own will, and a continual giving it up to that of another? The words of a holy man on this subject are, "We should be wholly given up to the conduct of him, whom God hath placed over us, in all things (where no sin lies) following his judgment not our own, except in very particular cases, where his commands actually wound our conscience: in which case we ought to say so, and lay it before two or three impartial, spiritual persons. And if they all agree, and we still can't follow his advice, it argues not strength but weakness of grace." Tho' this weakness, where the person is upright ought to be borne with, unless it would be of hurt to the whole community. "There are, says the same author, three degrees in this obedience.

The 1st. is when we *willingly* submit to those commands which we are *obliged* to submit to.

The 2d. which is better, is complying with those orders, we are not obliged to comply with.

But the 3d. and most perfect of all is, when knowing our superior's will, and not waiting for his orders, we prevent them by an antecedent conformity.

But who are the persons we are so to obey? St. Paul tells us, *The powers that be are ordained of God.* Those who are at this time set over the country where you dwell; the church you belong to; or the family you live in: All these whether high or low in grace, (as far as you can without sin) you are bound by the laws of God to obey. But more especially those who watch over our souls. Otherwise it is to be feared, he who hath said, *Touch not mine anointed,* should add, *Vengeance is mine, I will repay.*

At this time, my dear sisters, in a particular manner, do I intreat you with all the powers of my soul; as my *last request* do I intreat you, to cry for an obedient, humble, peaceful spirit. O were we all but penetrated with true humility; did every member but know, and stand in his own place, the peace of our church would not be broken, as now it is. But do not cry "Where is the *Jonah* that causes all this storm?" Alas, alas, he is in your breast and mine. Have we not left our first love? Have we not stepped out of our place, and set up ourselves as judges many times condemning the innocent, and justifying the guilty? (both which are an abomination before God.) Too sure we have. Now, now the Lord is saying to every one among us, "Who hath required this at your hands?" His hand is now on our church, trying and proving us, that he may do us good in our latter end. May our spirits be humbled in the dust before him: and then he who still *walketh in the midst of the golden candlesticks, and holdeth the stars in his right hand,* will be unto us a wall of salvation: and our gates shall be praise.

I again repeat, The earnest desire of my soul for you is, that you may abide in the faith, and indure unto the end. That you may covet to walk in the most excellent way, and be found continually standing on your guard and watching unto prayer. Then will the eternal God be your refuge, and underneath you, the everlasting arms. He will set your sins far from you: and cause you to dwell in purity of heart and in safety. You shall be a people saved of the Lord, who shall himself become your guide and your exceeding great reward.

F I N I S.



